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NEW YORK, JUNE 4, 1898

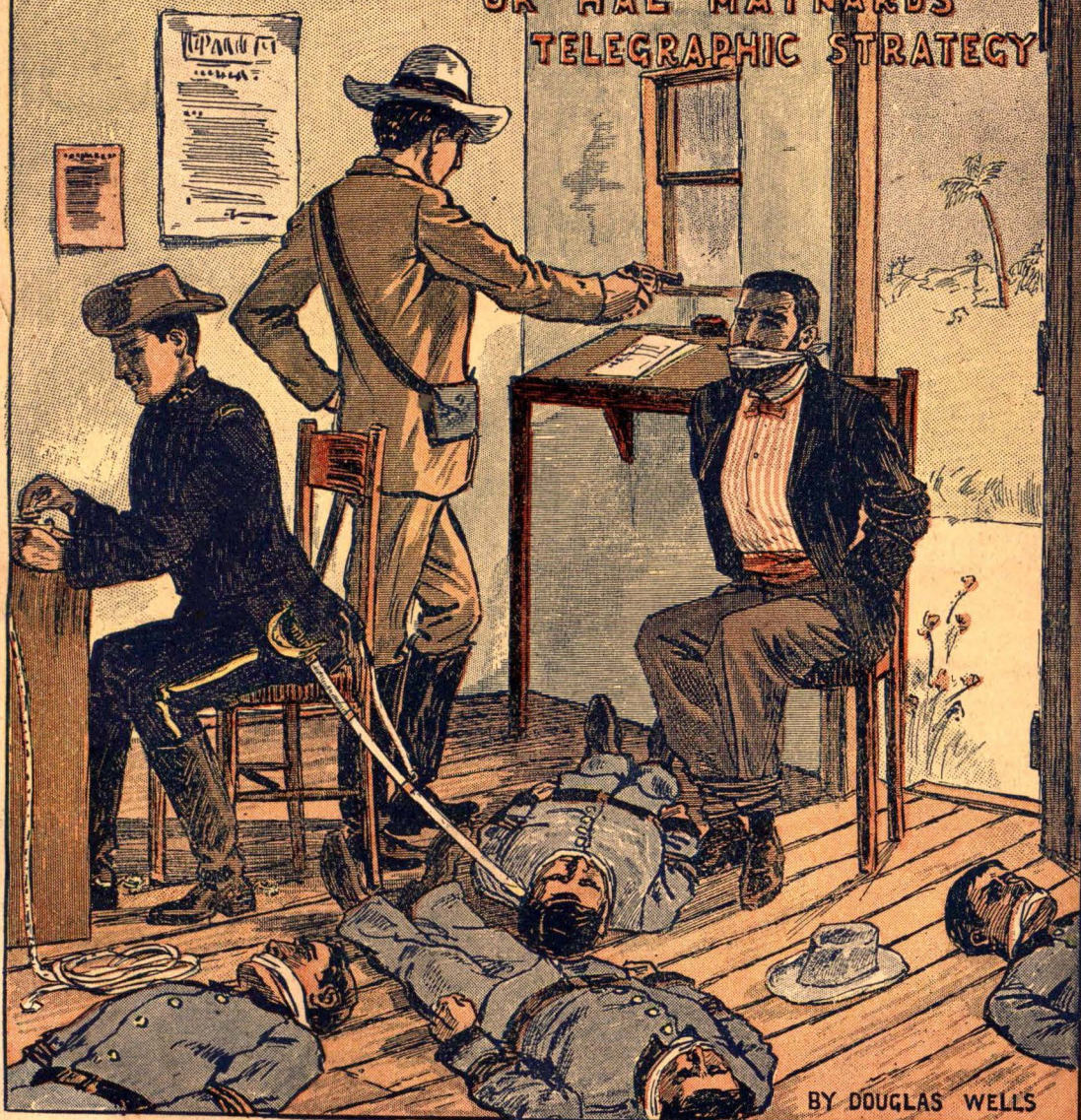
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STARRY FLAG WEEKLY

THRILLING STORIES OF OUR VICTORIOUS ARMY

UNCLE SAM'S SPECIAL

OR HAL MAYNARD'S
TELEGRAPHIC STRATEGY



BY DOUGLAS WELLS

HAL TICKED OFF THE MESSAGE DESTINED TO LURE THE SPANISH ARMY TO DISASTER.

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Starry Flag Weekly

Issued Weekly.—By Subscription, \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, STREET & SMITH, 81 Fulton St., N. Y. Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1898, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.

No. 5.

NEW YORK, June 4, 1898.

Price Five Cents.

Uncle Sam's Special;

OR,

Hal Maynard's Telegraphic Strategy.

By DOUGLAS WELLS.

First Part.

CHAPTER I.

FAST COMRADES.

"Break ranks, march!"

As a squad of United States regular cavalymen stepped off to their tents, Hal Maynard sheathed his sabre, unhooked it, scabbard and all, and started for his tent.

Mi amigo!"

"Eh, Juan, my dear fellow," replied the young lieutenant, exchanging salutes as soon as he saw who had hailed him.

The two shook hands as warmly as if they had not met before that day.

Juan Ramirez was a captain in the Cuban army, and at present attached to the staff of General Gomez.

Both youngsters had started in the Cuban service, but Hal, while at Key West, had been offered a second lieutenant's commission if he would return to Cuba, escorted by only a squad of regular cavalry, and carry messages through the Cuban forests to General Gomez—messages which requires a reply to be delivered to the authorities at Washington.

That reply from Gomez, which must include estimates of all the different kinds of supplies which the Cubans needed

from the United States, was not yet ready.

Meanwhile our hero and the men under him dallied in their own camp near the Cuban generalissimo's headquarters.

"In a day or two, now, the answer will be ready," had been General Gomez' reply.

Hal lost no time in idling. Until within the last forty-eight hours there had been exciting work enough for him to do. Now, in the absence of anything else he kept his squad at as steady drill as the climate would permit.

"You have something unusual to say?" interrogated Hal, after looking keenly into his chum's face.

"It is good-bye, perhaps," said Juan, smiling bravely, though Maynard could see that the other was agitated.

"Good-bye?"

"I am going off on business."

"Ah!"

"Past the Cuban lines."

"A dangerous mission?"

"Mi amigo," replied Juan, laying a hand on Hal's arm, "I have said all that I can say."

"I am answered," replied Hal, gravely.

Military officers, entrusted with important duties, do not discuss them, even with their most intimate friends.

Are You a Patriotic Boy? Read True Blue.

Military movements are made with great secrecy. An officer who discusses his orders with those not included in them commits a breach of etiquette which renders him untrustworthy in the eyes of his superiors.

Hence Juan's evasive answer.

"I may start back to the coast tomorrow. If not then, it will be the day after," said Hal, musingly.

"As I said before, *mi amigo*, this hand-clasp of ours may be good-by."

"No; only adios," smiled Hal. "If we do not meet immediately the campaign will not be much older when we shall meet in the field."

"Heaven knows that I hope so, *mi amigo*."

Both were smiling, yet both felt a tug at the heart-strings.

Men who have campaigned together, fought side by side, and saved each other from death times almost without number, grow to feel an affection for each other that is deeper than ordinary friendship.

It was such a feeling that existed between Lieutenant Maynard and Captain Ramirez.

"Juan," cried Hal, suddenly, as each clasped the other's hand again, "will you wait for me five minutes or so?"

"Certainly, *mi amigo*."

"I will not be away longer than is necessary."

"I have a few minutes to spare," Juan called after him, while seating himself on the grass.

Hal strode swiftly over to General Gomez' tent.

The sentinels had orders to admit Lieutenant Maynard at all times, so they merely saluted as our hero stepped past them and through the tent door.

General Maximo Gomez sat at a table on which was spread a map of the province, which he was absorbedly scanning, making notes from time to time.

His whole mind was centred on the task, yet he looked up the instant that our hero's form threw a shadow over the table.

"Ah, my American friend."

"General, I have not come to bother you. I will take but a minute of your time. I have heard that Captain Ramirez

is to leave camp on a mission. I am inclined to suspect that he is going beyond the Cuban zone of operations. If that is true, I have come, sir, to ask your permission to go with him."

"It is true that the captain is going beyond our theatre of operations. It is a most important mission, though perhaps not a dangerous one."

"I did not inquire about the danger of it, sir. Safe or risky it is enough for me to be permitted to go with him."

"But I am compelled to think somewhat of the risk," replied General Gomez. "When you went out among the *reconcentrados* you came very near being annihilated with your command. Since I feel responsible for your safe return to the United States with my despatches, when they are ready, I should be reluctant to see you expose yourself to any unnecessary danger."

"But I understood you to say, general, that this mission of Captain Ramirez cannot be classed with the dangerous ones."

"It is more important than dangerous. No, I do not really think it is dangerous, though it will take him within the range of the Spanish movements. But officers who have had such valuable experience as yourself and the captain should be able to easily take care of yourselves."

"Then I have your permission to accompany Captain Ramirez?"

"You have it, if you wish it."

"I thank you, general. 'I shall go.'"

As Hal, saluting, turned to leave the tent, General Gomez detained him by a gesture.

"Since you are bent upon going, lieutenant, it is as well that I should tell you what the errand is. If anything were to happen to Captain Ramirez at the critical moment, you would doubtless be able to put his business through for him."

"That is hardly likely, sir," rejoined Hal. "If Captain Ramirez were to be killed or wounded, I should not leave the field without I had first avenged his mishap by killing all of his enemies."

"I am sure that neither would desert the other," responded Gomez. "But let me tell you what the business is. Thirty miles to the east of here is within the

lines along which the Spanish troops are moving to the sea-coast. Just about thirty miles from here is the house of Senor Ensenada. He is a Spaniard, but he has given life and fortune to the service of Cuba. By not openly doing so he has retained some of the confidence of the Spanish commanders. He has been employed in obtaining information for us. He has some now, relative to the Spanish forces which are moving coastward. Last night, just as he was about to set out for this camp, he succumbed to sudden illness. He tried to come, but found that he could not. He sent a negro whom he trusts to say that his news is so important that he does not dare to trust it to any one less than one of my most trusted officers. Hence I am sending Captain Ramirez to him. If you are to go, too, lieutenant, you will understand that no escort is to go with you. Two men can move much more easily between the Spanish lines than a body of men could."

"I thank you general, for your confidence in me. I shall go with Captain Ramirez."

"And you do not think it foolish to thus expose yourself, where the exposure is not needed in the service of your country?"

"On the contrary, general, it is in the service of the United States that I am going. The ride will be through a part of the island with which I am not acquainted. A knowledge of the landmarks might be of great value to the United States commander when our forces arrive here in Cuba."

"If that is the view you take," said General Gomez, slowly.

"It is. May I ask if you approve of my idea, general?"

"I think you are justified in going, apart from your desire to be with your sworn comrade."

"I have your full permission and approval?"

"Quite so."

Saluting, Hal quitted the tent, leaving General Gomez to return to his study of the map.

"It's all right, Juan, dear boy," uttered Hal, gleefully, as he stepped briskly up to his comrade.

"Eh!" quoth Juan, looking puzzled.

"It's all right, I say. I'm going with you."

Juan's face lighted up. He hugged his comrade, Cuban fashion.

"Let us get our horses out at once, mi amigo," urged the Cuban. "Oh, but it is good news to know that you are to ride with me. Myself, I feel able to whip ten Spaniards in any field, but with you with me we are ready for four times that number."

"Your card, Juan?" laughed Hal.

"My card, mi amigo. I have not one. We Cuban soldiers in the field cannot encumber ourselves with such useless luxuries."

"It is your business card that I want."

"My business card?"

"Yes, your card as a florist."

"Now, what under the sun do you mean, mi amigo? I never was a florist. Bah!"

"But you must own a few conservatories. A fellow who throws bouquets as recklessly as you do must have a vast supply of flowers."

"Oh, that is more of your slang, mi amigo," protested Juan. "But I am in earnest in what I say about your skill in disposing of Spaniards. Have not I seen what you can do?"

"But to wipe out thirty of them—confess, my dear Juan, that there is something decidedly floral about that."

Laughing, the boys went off arm-in-arm to order their horses.

Five minutes later they galloped out of camp.

A mission that was not dangerous?

There are few such at the front.

Hal and Juan were at the beginning of their most perilous adventure of all!

CHAPTER II.

WITHIN THE ENEMY'S LINES.

Within the Spanish lines!

It was not a sudden discovery.

Hal and Juan had known, during the last five miles of the way that they were between the lines of march of parallel columns of Spanish soldiers.

They had ridden all day. It was now nearly dark.

"CLIF FARADAY UNDER FIRE." READ TRUE BLUE.

Sitting in the saddle on their motionless steeds at the top of a hill, they swept with their field glasses as much as was visible of the densely wooded surrounding country.

"Ah!" muttered Juan, suddenly. "Mi amigo, look over there. Do you see that tip of a chimney between the trees?"

"Decidedly," replied Hal, after sweeping his glass around.

"Unless I studied the map to little purpose, that is Senor Ensenada's house."

"It can not be more than two miles distant."

"It is exactly two miles from this hill, if the map was correct."

"And between us and that is the road over which a Spanish regiment is marching."

"Why do you say so?"

"What else can the cloud of dust two miles to the southward mean?"

"True," nodded Juan, wheeling around to look. "And it is infantry, not cavalry. You can tell that much by the way the dust is thrown up."

"Isn't it time to move?" suggested Hal.

"Quite, if we are to get across the road before the column comes along."

Digging spurs into their jaded ponies, they set out briskly, cantering down the hill and across the level ground below.

As they rode, they slipped their pistol holsters into handier positions.

This was not because they expected to meet the infantry column, but soldiers traveling through a hostile country almost invariably send scouts and an advance guard ahead.

It was the danger of meeting such parties as these that the American and Cuban officers were preparing against.

Half a mile away from the road they began to trot their horses.

At a distance more than an eighth of a mile from the highway both riders brought their steeds down to a walk.

While still out of sight of the road, both noiselessly dismounted.

From there on they led their horses toward the point where their own progress must cut across the line of march of the enemy. The slightest accident might result in their capture.

To be captured by the Spanish, within their lines, could have but one meaning. They would be executed as spies.

While true soldiers do not fear to die in open battle, the bravest man in uniform is filled with dread at thought of being ignominiously hung, and such is the fate meted out to spies.

"Ss-sst!" came from Hal, softly, as he held up a warning hand.

Juan, just behind him, stopped instantly.

Tramping sounded along the road. Both young officers saw at the same moment, the Spanish advance.

It consisted of about thirty men, trudging lamely along, under command of a mounted lieutenant.

So suddenly had this vision come upon our young friends, that they had not time to hide.

For that reason, they stood motionless by their horses, trusting to the shadows of the forest to conceal them in the coming night.

For full two minutes, perhaps, this advance guard remained in sight. Then it passed out of view.

"You are changing, my friend," smiled Hal.

"How so, my friend?" queried Juan, in surprise.

"A few weeks ago you would have wanted to attack that party. If I, in my timidity, had refused, you would have sulked the rest of the day.

The young Cuban captain smiled in his quiet way.

"I still believe, mi amigo, that you and I together could have whipped that rabble."

"I'm glad we didn't go to unnecessary pains to find out," said Hal, quietly, as he sprang into saddle.

Pistol in hand he rode across the road, Juan coming two paces behind.

Once more in the depths of the forest, they struck a trot, holding to it hard for a half a mile.

"Better dismount now, mi amigo," advised Juan.

Once more on foot, they went cautiously forward.

At every eight or ten paces they halted to listen.

"We cannot be very far from Senor Ensenada's house," murmured Ramirez.

"Would it not be better to hide our horses in the nearest tangle of brush, and go forward on foot?"

"You are right, decidedly."

In that deep forest it was not difficult to find such a hiding-place for their horses.

This matter disposed of, the young officers stole forward.

It was now full night, and so dark in the forest that, in order not to lose each other, they touched hands as they walked.

"Are you sure we are headed in the right direction?" whispered Hal.

"Do you remember a solitary giant palm, in the straight line from the hill?"

"Yes."

"Is this it?"

Juan placed his hand upon the trunk of a palm, and both looked up to where its top was dimly outlined against the sky.

"It is the palm," pronounced Hal.

"I agree with you. There was no other tree like it anywhere near. And in that case, we are on the straight line."

For another hundred yards they stole forward.

A familiar sound caused them suddenly to halt—a horse's whinny.

"Our beasts?" queried Juan, in a whisper.

"I am quite sure not. It came from ahead, rather than from the rear.

"There's another whinny."

"And others."

"All from ahead."

"Senor Ensenada would not have so many horses?" queried Hal.

"Decidedly not."

"Then we are coming upon at least a Spanish patrol. More likely a battalion or regiment of cavalry. Since we do not hear the tramp of cavalry, it must be that a Spanish mounted force is camped here for the night.

At that rate, they were likely, at any moment, to stumble upon a Spanish vedette, or, what would be more dangerous still, a dismounted sentinel concealed behind shrubbery.

It was a trying moment, even for old campaigners.

Not to know at what moment one is apt to be fired upon in the dark is trying to the nerves of the bravest soldier.

Hal gripped Juan's arm. It was a signal to halt.

With their mouths close to each other's ears they conferred in whispers.

"Had we better move a little apart?"

"Why?" counter-questioned Ramirez.

"If one should be shot, the other would want to avenge that shot. Thus, if we move apart, and one is fired upon, the other will be in a better position to send an unlooked-for ball into the Spaniard who does the shooting."

"It sounds as if you were right, mi amigo," admitted Juan.

"And we will come together every fifty yards."

"It is agreed, mi amigo."

Shaking hands earnestly, they glided away.

Calculating his step at twenty-seven inches, our hero kept onward until he had counted sixty-seven steps.

Then he wheeled at right angles, going in the direction he expected to find Juan.

They met, face to face.

"We must be very near the house," was Ramirez's opinion.

"Listen."

They heard, not this time the whinny of horses, but the low, murmuring voices of men.

"Decidedly we are near the house," declared Hal.

"Let us separate again, until we come to the edge of the clearing."

Once more they parted, stealing off in the darkness.

It was barely a hundred steps to the beginning of a clearing.

Hal's revolver was now in his left hand. His right clutched at the machete, or Cuban sword, which, for this trip, he had substituted for his sabre as being the more valuable weapon.

If they were near any considerable body of the enemy, it would not be advisable to use the pistol on a chance sentinel in a position where steel would do the work as well.

A step at a time, Hal stole northward.

He came upon Juan, slightly nearer the edge of the clearing.

"Here," whispered Ramirez gripping his shoulder. "Do you see the light yonder?"

"Yes."

"It comes from one of the windows of Senor Ensenada's house. Watch it for a moment or two."

Hal did so.

"I saw a figure pass it, then. And another."

"People on the veranda of the house," replied Juan.

"Your opinion, then?"

"I believe that the officers of a cavalry command have seized it for quarters. In that case, the men will be quartered in the grounds."

"We cannot go much further then, without stumbling upon a sentinel."

"Surely," argued Juan, "it was only good fortune that we did not encounter any in the woods. There must be some there, for the Spanish officer would be unusually foolish who would take no precaution against a night surprise by Gomez."

"And Senor Ensenada?"

"May be entertaining the officers, under compulsion. You know, mi amigo, he pretends to be loyal to Spain. It is in that way that he best serves Cuba."

Juan whispered this so softly that Hal, with his ear to the Cuban's mouth, barely heard.

"And if he is, on the other hand, a prisoner?"

Juan's eyes flashed.

"We must find that out," he replied quickly.

Cautiously sheathing their machetes, but still retaining their revolvers, both young officers throw themselves upon the ground.

Watching and peering for some moments, they wriggled a few yards toward the house.

They halted again.

In line between themselves and the light from the house stood a Spanish sentinel.

He stood leaning upon his gun, but his attitude suggested alertness rather than drowsiness.

A few feet more forward, and the boys paused again.

Out of the direct line of light, now, the sentinel was but dimly visible.

A few yards more, and, owing to the darkness, they could not see him at all.

They were past him, now, but a new danger quickly menaced.

Tramp! tramp! tramp! A dozen soldiers of the guard, under command of a sergeant, were going the rounds, relieving the sentinels.

This squad passed within fifteen feet of Hal, who was nearer them than his comrade.

Logs could not have lain more still on the ground than did the American and Cuban officers.

Had the sergeant been looking about him, he must have seen them. As it was, with eyes ahead, he passed by the lurkers to relieve the sentinel whom they had just passed.

For another hundred feet the young officers moved forward undisturbed.

It was Hal who suddenly put out his hand to stay Juan.

Instantly their heads were close together.

"Danger!" breathed Hal. "There are sleeping men sixty or seventy feet ahead of us."

"I can make out their figures," nodded Juan. "Since they are asleep, suppose we try to pass through them?"

"Too risky," objected Hal. "No use taking foolish chances."

"We must make a detour, then?"

"It is better."

Five minutes later, after safely passing two more sentinels, our young friends found themselves between the sleeping men and the house.

The nearest point of that building was now some hundred feet away.

"Come in here," whispered Hal, urging his friend toward a clump of tall flowering bushes.

They gained its shelter undetected.

Tramp! tramp! sounded footsteps on the gravelled path.

Tramp! tramp! came some one in the opposite direction.

Two Spanish officers met and saluted near the bush.

ARE YOU A PATRIOTIC BOY? READ TRUE BLUE.

"You are vigilant, captain," cried one of them.

"Yes, colonel. Making the rounds of the sentinels. It would not pay to have a sleepy or dull fellow on post to-night. We are too near that bandit, Gomez."

"You are right to be vigilant, captain, though I do not believe he will come within miles of us."

"I have a question to ask you, my colonel, concerning Senor Ensenada."

At this, both lurkers in the bushes redoubled their alertness.

CHAPTER III.

SEÑOR ENSENADA'S FATE.

"What about that dog?" growled the Spanish colonel.

Hal felt Juan start.

"I have had no instructions, my colonel, as to how I am to treat him."

"You have him ironed?"

"Yes, colonel."

"You are sure that he cannot escape?"

"I do not see how he can do it."

"Then that is all until morning."

"I am not to feed him, then?"

"One who is to face a firing squad does not need a full stomach."

Juan gave another great start.

"It is all decided, then, colonel?"

"Not absolutely, captain. I may question him to-night. His fate will depend upon his answers, and the credence which I attach to them. However, I think we may say that he is a dog, and if that is so—well, as officer of the guard you will be able to furnish a squad of four men who know how to shoot. Make your rounds as quickly as you can, captain. We have found a few bottles of wine in Senor Ensenada's cellar, and they will not last long. You will do well to join us quickly."

"I shall be there within fifteen minutes, my colonel."

"By the way, where is the prisoner?"

"In a little room on the second floor, over the library."

"Adios, captain."

"Adios, my colonel."

Separating, the two officers continued their respective walks in opposite directions.

"You are trembling, dear boy," whispered Hal.

"It is for Senor Ensenada," replied Juan. "Mi amigo, his very life is in danger. We must save him."

"By all means," coincided Hal. "How we are to do it, I can't imagine, but if the poor fellow has forfeited his chance of life for his loyalty to Cuba, one thing is certain."

"And that is——"

"That we could never retreat to safety without him as our companion."

Juan's hand sought Hal's, giving it a grateful squeeze.

"It is high time for us to begin to reconnoitre," suggested Hal.

"Will you lead the way, mi amigo?"

"If you wish it."

"I do, because this is precarious, particular business, and you are the cooler. Lead on, mi amigo."

Once more Hal Maynard lay flat upon the ground.

Moving snake fashion he raised his head every few feet to look about him.

An inner line of pickets surrounded the house.

It took our young friends ten minutes to get past this line, but, thanks to the darkness, they did it safely at last.

Another clump of garden bushes gave them temporary safety.

They were now in plain view of the house, having also a view of one end of the veranda.

Here they saw two or three Spanish officers, sitting on the end, presumably of the regimental party.

Corks were popping, wine was flowing freely, and the officers, smoking and sipping, were laughing.

"When we fight the Yankees——" began one of the officers.

"When will that be?" demanded a quizzical voice. "Do you believe, captain, that the Yankees will dare to come to Cuba?"

"Oh, of that I am not so sure," began the first speaker. "But if they do not come here, it is certain that we shall go to the United States. Then the Yankees will have to fight."

"Do you think so?" demanded the quizzical one. "Now, let me venture a

prediction. When our glorious Spanish army invades the United States——"

The speaker paused until an approving murmur had subsided.

"When we invade the United States, I prophesy that the Yankees will all escape into the interior."

"But we can follow, captain. Our horses are rather fleet."

"We can never overtake the fleeting Yankees," continued the prophet. "Every Yankee in the United States owns a bicycle; they are a nation of bicycle riders, and their wheels are faster on good roads than our horses. Hence, when we invade the United States, we shall find nothing but absolutely deserted cities."

"When you chaps invade the United States," gritted listening Hal under his breath, "you'll do it as prisoners of war, and you'll find whatever you're led to."

Juan chuckled softly.

"How the sight of my uniform would please them," whispered Hal.

"On the contrary," protested Juan, "these Spaniards are such braggarts that the sight might terrify them. Really they do not yet believe that the United States forces are coming to Cuba."

"I have hopes of being ennobled," put in the colonel. "If so, I shall beg the queen regent to make me Duke of Florida."

"Oh, rats!" commented Hal, disgustfully. "Juan, if we listen to their talk much longer you will have a sick comrade on your hands. Let us be moving on our own work."

Since the lights from the house shed some rays over the ground it was now necessary to move with great caution to avoid being seen.

Moving at a little greater distance from the house, our hero worked his way past the side of the building.

Of a sudden he halted, waiting for Juan to reach his side.

"Look through that window," advised our hero, pointing. "Do you see the book-cases? That must be the library."

"Beyond a doubt."

"And that window on the story overhead must open from Senor Ensenada's

prison. There is a light there, also, you see."

Juan nodded thoughtfully.

"Follow me around to the rear of the house."

"And what then?"

"If we do not find something that is favorable, we will try to keep on all the way around the house."

"Good!"

As they neared the rear, the surroundings became darker, enabling our friends to move with greater freedom.

Jerk! Stopping short in his wriggle, Hal gave Ramirez a violent kick in the shoulder.

It was full time that they stopped. Sitting on a small back porch, with their feet dangling over the edge, were three Spanish soldiers.

Less than twenty feet away, they had sat there so silent, and so well concealed by the shadows, that the prowlers had had no idea of their presence.

An uneasy move on the part of one of the soldiers, a shifting of positions had produced a slight noise that instantly caught the sharp hearing of Lieutenant Maynard.

Seeing that his chum now lay quite still, without making signals, or offering to whisper, Juan, too, lay as still as a mouse.

Scratch! flare! One of the soldiers struck a match.

With his pistol in one hand, the other hand reaching for the machete hilt, Hal waited in alarmed suspense.

Brighter burned the match, and then flared up even more luminously, as the soldier, holding the flame against the end of a cigarette, drew through the tobacco with the effect of a bellows.

"Car-r-r-ramba!" cried one of the soldiers, starting to his feet. "There is some one crouching on the ground."

Hal's heart gave a great thump, Juan's heart playing him a similar trick.

"What is it?" calmly inquired the cigarette smoker.

"By the light of the match, before you threw it away, it looked like the forms of two men crouching there."

"Well," spoke up the third. "Suppose that two of our comrades do prefer

to sleep near the house? We do not belong to the guard, that we should thrust our noses into the affair."

"Wise philosopher, you," commented Hal, grimly.

"It is not two comrades," continued the soldier who had taken alarm, speaking after a few seconds of silence.

"And how do you know that?"

"Because sleeping men generally snore. Not a sound comes from that direction."

"Go and investigate, then, and you will be satisfied."

Again Hal's heart began to bump violently.

At that moment, a large drop of water plashed on his outstretched hand.

It was followed by another.

"Car-r-r-r-rajo!" jerked out the smoker. "The rain has put out my cigarette. Comrade, if you must, you may go and look at your spectres. I am going to get in the house before this coming rain becomes furious enough to drown us."

"And I also," added another.

"But I," disputed the one who had first taken alarm, "am going to see just what it was that caught my eye."

"And then come in and dry yourself," jeered the smoker.

By this time the sudden rain-storm was at its height, the heavens pouring a flood of drenching rain upon all under them.

While the other two went into the house, banging the door shut after them, the man who wanted to know stood in hesitation for a few moments.

Then, making up his mind, he jumped to the ground, striding swiftly toward the two crouching figures.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LURKER ON THE THRESHOLD.

At the first sound of the soldier's foot touching the gravel, Hal's plan was formed.

Letting his revolver rest on the ground beside him, he sat quickly up, stretching his arms.

"Comrade," he remarked in Spanish to Juan, "if this rain is to continue, we had better seek our captain's tent."

"REMEMBER THE MAINE!" READ TRUE BLUE, THE NEW NAVAL WEEKLY

This was intended by way of a joke, the cavalry being without field equipment.

"Ha!" growled Juan. "If this wet were not so uncomfortable, I would willingly laugh at your remark. But I am in a savage mood to be thus waked out of a sound sleep."

The soldier, coming slowly forward, eyed them attentively.

It was so dark that he could see little of their faces or uniforms, but their speech made it appear that they were members of the regiment who had undertaken to sleep away from their company.

Two steps nearer, however, and he clearly perceived the light-colored canvas of Juan's Cuban uniform.

Spain's soldier gave a violent start, opening his mouth to sound the alarm.

He stood quite near Hal Maynard.

Quick as a flash that young officer sprang up, seized the Spaniard by the head with one hand, and with the other shoved the muzzle of his revolver into the fellow's open mouth.

"Don't try to talk," cautioned Hal. "I'm in a position to shoot the whole top of your head off."

Even in the dark, rendered intenser by the rain, Hal could see the Spaniard's eyes bulge as if they would pop out of his head.

"Don't get yourself into trouble by begging for mercy," added Hal, in the same cautious whisper. "If you do just as you're told, you're safe."

Shaking like a leaf in the gale, the Spaniard remained mute.

"Put your hands behind you," ordered Lieutenant Maynard.

No sooner had the captive obeyed than Juan, slipping behind him, deftly lashed the wrists together.

"Kneel down," went on Hal, peremptorily, "but don't attempt to get your mouth away from the pistol."

The Spaniard obeyed, though he trembled so that our hero and Juan were forced to aid him.

Next they placed the fellow on his back, in which position Juan substituted a gag for the muzzle of the weapon.

"Now, my excellent comrade," resumed Hal, "make as secure a job of the

little sinner's feet, and we shall have him where we can handle him."

Since our hero spoke in English, the soldier could understand him, but his trembling increased.

"That is a good, dark-looking space under the house," went on Hal. "We'll stow him there."

And there they put him, so far into the shadow that there was no likelihood of the fellow being discovered before daylight.

"Shall we try the back door?" asked Juan.

"It is certainly the only way we can enter the house. But if those two soldiers are standing inside the door——"

"It must be worse for them," finished Juan, laying his hand upon the hilt of his machete.

Hal prepared himself similarly.

Side by side they stole up the steps, our hero cautiously turning the knob of the door.

That barrier yielded readily enough to admit them.

Inside, a corridor ran from front to back door. It was practically dark, the only light coming from the veranda.

"Nobody in the way," whispered Hal, wistfully eying the nearby staircase that led upstairs.

"Chance it," urged Juan.

Hal nodding, they reached the foot of the stairs without being discovered.

"A quick, soft dash," murmured our hero, hearing sounds on the veranda as if some of the officers were about to enter.

With rapid, stealthy movements they bounded up the stairs.

There was not time to look backward. Both kept lookout ahead.

They gained the landing, dodged into an open doorway.

"This room has been taken by some of the officers," whispered Hal, fumbling in the dark against saddles and harness piled in a heap at one side of the room.

"We are liable to be found here at any moment, mi amigo."

"We must find the library. It is the door past that that leads into Senor Ensenada's prison."

"There is also a sentinel to find. Do you hear him walking? We shall run

into him the instant we turn the corner of the corridor."

"It will be worse for him, then," muttered Hal, doggedly.

"Wait till I find the lay of the land."

While Juan stood just in the doorway of the room, Hal lay down flat and wriggled to the corner of the corridor.

His head close to the floor, he looked past the corner.

In a twinkling he was up on his feet again, darting out of sight.

Juan followed with swift stealth. He was just in time to see Maynard glide up behind the sentinel who was pacing in the same direction, with his back squarely turned.

Whack! The butt of Hal's pistol descended on the soldier's head with fearful force.

It was a knock-out blow—a terrific one.

For an instant the soldier reeled. As he fell, Hal caught him with one arm, catching the sentinel's gun with the other hand.

"Magnificent!" murmured Ramirez, gliding up behind his comrade.

"Here is the door of Ensenada's room," whispered Hal. "Open it. Then help me to take this fellow in as quickly as it can be done."

Juan sprang to obey. The door opened with difficulty. In an instant they had the unconscious sentinel inside and the door again closed.

Hal knelt over the Spaniard, prepared to choke him into silence the second he should show signs of regaining his senses.

Juan gazed swiftly about the apartment. Then a cry of rage escaped him.

"We are tricked, mi amigo, or else in the wrong room. There is no prisoner here."

Hal looked swiftly round.

"This sentinel was not here guarding an empty room," he asserted.

"But in that case, where is the prisoner?"

"There is a closet over there. Look into it."

At the fourth word Juan started. He yanked open the door, looked inside, gave a low cry of satisfaction, and disappeared into the closet.

Hal did not dare to leave the sentinel,

"A Naval Cadet's Torpedo Boat Command." See True Blue

did not deem it wise to even look around again, but waited until Juan staggered up to him, depositing a human burden on the floor.

It was a man, of middle age apparently, and appparelled like a prosperous planter.

Wrists and ankles were securely bound. A gag had been forced between his teeth, wedged in with unnecessary force.

"It is Senor Ensenada," whispered Juan, instantly beginning to remove the gag.

"Yes," acknowledged the prisoner, as soon as he could use his tongue.

"In a jiffy more, senor, you shall be free. I am the officer sent you by General Gomez."

"Never did a messenger come more opportunely," sighed Ensenada, as Juan deftly slipped the cords from his wrists. "But your comrade. His uniform is that of——"

"Our great Uncle Sam. More of that later, senor. Now, your feet are free."

Hal had taken no part in the conversation, had not dared to remove his eyes from the face of the man over whom he bent.

"Is that gag still in good condition?" he asked.

"Excellent!" gritted Juan.

"Then hand it here, for my prisoner. The cords, too, will come handy."

While the young officers bound the sentinel, Senor Ensenada stretched his cramped limbs by walking softly back and forth.

His flashing eyes blazed with satisfaction when he saw them lift the prisoner and carry him to the closet.

"I am not sorry for the rascal's fate, senors," declared Ensenada, as Hal and Juan returned to face him.

"And now, senor," responded Ramirez, speaking hurriedly, "let me advise you to follow us away from here as quickly as possible. In view of your treatment it will probably not surprise you to learn that you are to be shot at daylight."

"One question first, gentlemen," interposed the planter. "Is there any danger that we may not succeed in escaping from here?"

"A very great danger," answered Juan, promptly.

"Then before we go, let me whisper to you all the information that I would send to General Gomez. If I do not get away from here, it is possible that you will. General Gomez must not be deprived of the information that I had for him."

Nodding, Hal stepped away.

Juan and the planter conferred in whispers, the Cuban captain taking a few notes.

"You will not forget any part of what I have told you?" questioned Ensenada, when he had finished.

"Not a word, senor."

"That news will be of the utmost importance to General Gomez."

"I appreciate the fact, senor. Be assured that if I return to headquarters alive the general shall know all that you have told me."

"And now for our escape. I can hardly believe that I am to get away from here."

As he wheeled about, Ensenada suddenly turned color.

"Diablo!" gasped Juan.

For the door had softly opened, and on the threshold stood the Spanish colonel.

Second Part.

CHAPTER V.

A RED HOT CHASE.

Spain's colonel stood aghast.

The scene was so utterly different from what he had expected to see that for an instant he lost his self-possession.

In his bewilderment he took three steps into the room.

"A Cuban here in——" he began, but that was as far as he got.

Hal Maynard had hid behind the opening door.

One step past him, without seeing him, went the Spanish colonel.

Thump! A dizzying blow from the butt of Hal's pistol landed on the colonel's cranium.

He staggered, reeled, sought to recover himself as our hero made a second spring after him.

"Guard! Treachery!" bellowed the colonel, lustily.

Whack! Hal's second blow laid him out completely.

"Work like lightning," quivered our hero. "Off with that blouse, cape and cap."

He helped Juan to strip the fallen foe—a task that was accomplished in seconds, where minutes might ordinarily have been expended.

"The cape, Ensenada!" gritted Hal. "Juan, the cap and blouse!"

"But you, mi amigo?" protested Ramirez.

"Now don't stop to argue."

Juan pulled on the colonel's blouse over his own, substituted the cap for his sombrero, which latter he hid under his newly acquired blouse.

In the same few seconds Senor Ensenada wrapped himself in the long military cloak.

Below was heard the sound of excited voices, then rapid steps on the stairs.

"To the window!" thrilled Hal. "Every second means a life now!"

Pouf! With a breath he extinguished the light.

Next three bounds carried him to the window.

Ramirez, throwing up the sash, sprang through.

"You next, Ensenada!"

Without loss of time the Cuban planter sprang through the window.

Hal followed, dropping to the ground a dozen feet below.

His two comrades were already putting off through the darkness.

It was full time, for hardly had Hal cleared the sill when a dozen Spanish officers entered the scene of the late conflict.

"Hardly one show in a dozen to get through," panted Maynard, inwardly, as he raced between his friends.

"Guard!" yelled a stentorian voice from the window. In an instant there was commotion.

The rain was still pouring in sheets, causing the wretched Spanish soldiers, sleeping without tents, to huddle in the best shelter that could be found under the bushes.

Nearly all of the men were awake.

As our three friends dashed along, they saw ahead of them the moving figures of a company of soldiers hastily assembling.

"Juan," panted Hal, "you understand? You are a Spaniard."

"For a minute," gritted Ramirez.

There was no time to say more, for they were close upon the soldiers.

There had not been time to avoid these men, and, had they done so, it would have invited instant suspicion.

Instead, Juan now took the lead, bel- lowing as he dashed up to where the nearest men stood:

"Who is in charge here?"

"I, senor," responded a non-commis- sioned officer, leaping forward and salut- ing the Spanish uniform that Juan wore.

"You, sergeant. Very well; lead your company to the house as quickly as you can. There is a band of Cubans within the lines. Be quick!"

And Juan, who had hardly paused, continued to run forward while the Span- ish soldiers, believing him to be one of their own officers, made way for him.

Ensenada's long military cloak fooled them into believing him another officer.

As for Hal, his dark uniform, so differ- ent from that worn by the Cubans, did not attract attention.

He was with two Spanish officers. That fact, in itself, would have vouched for him, if these drenched, excited men had paid particular heed to him.

Thirty minutes more of hard running brought them upon the sentinels.

"Halt!" came the hail, simultaneously, from two sentries.

"Fools!" roared Juan. "Would you fire upon your own officers? The house is being attacked by Cubans. Fall back upon the house, where you will find the officer of the guard rallying enough of you stupid sentries to save the colonel from Cuban capture."

Halting only long enough to project this information at the guards, Ramirez and his companions kept on.

As for the sentinels, they stood a min- ute undecided. But there was a sound of turmoil over at the big house by this time. Plainly, something was wrong.

They set out upon a run to obey the orders of these supposed Spanish officers.

Our three fugitives had now only the forest before them, unless there should prove to be videttes posted in the way.

"We have certainly kicked up a fine excitement," smiled Juan, showing his white teeth as he turned to Hal.

"And it won't take them many seconds more to find it out. Then we can look for trouble."

"And give it," retorted Juan.

"We are headed in the direction that we left our horses, are we not?"

"Yes."

"Then head straight for the thicket, if you can. But I forgot, Senor Ensenada," added Hal, thrusting his arm through the planter's, "that you are ill."

"Was ill," corrected the other.

"You feel strong enough to run like this. We are not exhausting you?"

"Not in the least," declared the planter, puffing as if every breath indrawn would be his last.

"Let me help you also," cried Juan, catching hold of Ensenada's other arm.

"Gentlemen," puffed the planter, "you are giving yourselves unnecessary trouble."

Ta-ra-ta-ta-ta! pealed a bugle to the rear of them.

"We can't lag many moments," uttered Hal. "They are calling their men to horse."

Before the fugitives had run a hundred feet further a thunder of hoofs began behind them.

"If they overtake us," gritted Hal, "we are done for."

A crackling volley of musketry sounded behind them.

"The reckless fools!" vented Hal. "They are firing even before they know where to look for us."

"They will soon know," groaned Juan, "for another minute will place them at our heels."

"Don't say another word," directed Maynard. "We are winding ourselves by talking. Lead the way, Juan, and we will do our best to keep on after you."

Again came that rattling, irregular volley of musketry.

Zippering bullets swept between the trees, one going so close to Maynard's ear that he unconsciously dodged.

Ensenada, though running bravely, held them back. Had it not been for their determination to save the planter, too, the young officers might have escaped.

Now that they, too, were under the trees, the pursuing cavalry came on more slowly.

Still they gained gradually upon the fleeing trio.

The third volley of bullets whistled all about Hal and his comrades.

"Shall we give them a return?" demanded Juan.

"No! Run!"

Grumbling somewhat under his breath, Juan kept in the lead.

"Our thicket!" he gasped, soon after, and dove into it.

In plunged Hal after him. Both rode out, mounted.

"Up in front of me, senor," quivered Hal.

The noise now made by the pursuing squadron's hoofs almost drowned out his words.

Ensenada understood, nevertheless, and was up in a twinkling before Hal.

"There is a river not far from here. Let me guide you to it," urged the planter.

"Willingly. Take the bridle."

Another crashing fire drowned out Hal's last words.

So close were the Spanish riders that the flash of their rifles illumined the woods enough to furnish a dim view of the fugitives.

Yet, despite the closeness of the range, not one of the latter was hit.

The flash, however, showed the escaping trio just as they were in the act of changing their course.

After them, in the new direction, wheeled the trailing squadron.

Another volley whizzed harmlessly by.

"Confound the rascals!" gritted Maynard. "They're firing, now, for the purpose of lighting up the woods."

"We are near the river," declared Ensenada. "Another minute's riding, at this pace, will bring us to the bank. We——"

"A NAVAL CADET'S TORPEDO BOAT COMMAND"—SEE TRUE BLUE.

Crash! Whatever the planter said was inaudible to the youth riding behind him.

"Curse the scoundrels!" came hoarsely from Juan.

Hal turned just in time to see Ramirez's horse plunge and fall.

One of the whistling projectiles had brought down that noble beast.

"Stop!" thundered Hal.

As quickly as could be, Senor Ensenada pulled the horse down to a trot.

Juan, sprinting like a deer, had kept up with them on foot so far.

"Ensenada," quivered Hal, "I am going to dismount. Wheel at an angle, and try to escape across the river. Do not dispute. Ride."

Off sprang the horse as Hal, quitting the saddle, struck the earth at Captain Ramirez's side.

"Why did you do that?" queried Juan, half angrily.

"Comrade, we have never deserted each other yet. To-night would be a bad time to start. Give me your hand."

They clasped hands, running side by side. Behind them was the enemy's squadron, coming relentlessly nearer.

Suddenly the open appeared before the boys.

"The river!" gasped Hal. "In with you, comrade!"

Both stood poised for the spring into the water.

Before them came a quick flash that made them recoil.

An instant after, when too late, they understood the meaning of that flash.

It came from the search light of a gunboat moored in the river.

"Bah!" growled Hal, blinking.

"Jump, old fellow!"

But even as he spoke, the cavalry came upon them.

Standing as the two boys did, in the full glare of that search light, they presented a splendid mark.

Quick as thought, came a long range volley from the foremost cavalrymen.

Only a second after the sharp volley did the two figures stand thus.

Then, throwing up their arms, they reeled forward and fell.

Plash! The river water covered both.

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER THE SEARCHLIGHT.

Glare! The strong, irradiating glow of the search light streamed over the water.

Aboard the gunboat the officer on the bridge had seen the two fugitives fall. That officer now made it his business to learn whether the two fugitives were still alive.

Checking their horses just at the water's edge, the cavalrymen strained their eyes to see the bodies of their victims.

But the bodies of neither Hal nor Juan appeared on the surface.

Though the light flashed back and forth, luminously penetrating every foot of the waters for a quarter of a mile up and down the stream, not so much as a head was discovered.

"Car-r-r-rambo!" growled a Spanish captain. "It is odd that the dead bodies do not float."

"Probably the carcasses are too full of lead," suggested another officer.

"There is sense in what you say, lieutenant. I had not thought of that."

Nevertheless, despite the precautions taken to find them, Maynard and Ramirez still lived.

Caught by the fire, yet unharmed by it, their plunge into the stream had been a ruse.

For the first hundred yards they swam under water.

After that two heads bobbed up close together.

"Juan!"

"Hal!"

"You are hurt?"

"Not by so much as a scratch. But you?"

"No worse off than yourself."

"Bah!" breathed Juan, contemptuously, "what these Spaniards need is a drill-master who understands shooting. Every ball that passed me went high up over my head."

"Duck, old fellow. Here comes the search light."

As the line of light swept toward them over the water, both sank without leaving so much as a ripple to mark the spot.

Hal swam fifty yards just under the

surface, until, looking upward, he saw that the light no longer illumined that portion of the river.

As his head bobbed up, Juan swam close behind him.

They were now close to the gunboat, whose black sides loomed up almost in their path.

Over the rail, despite the pouring rain, hung many of the Spanish sailors, still scanning the water in whatever direction the light turned.

It came toward the two swimmers again, causing both to disappear.

When they came up again, they were barely past the gunboat.

For some moments they swam as silently as possible though neither any longer feared detection by the search light since the flare was not being operated from side of the vessel.

"They're still using their electric lantern," chuckled Hal, finally, as he flopped over and began to swim easily on his back.

"By this time," grimaced Juan, "they must have come to the conclusion that we are too full of lead to float. They will soon give up the search." Almost instantly the prediction was verified, a bugle blast from the now further shore showing that the cavalymen were marching back to their lately startled camp.

Nor did the searchlight continue to play up and down the stream.

"We are dead," mimicked Ramirez. "Our deaths will soon be published in the Spanish reports. I am curious, mi amigo, to know how many men we shall be considered worth. Doubtless the Spanish bulletins will report a fight with the insurgents in which forty Cubans were killed and sixty wounded."

"That gives me an idea," chuckled Lieutenant Maynard. "Now I know the basis on which the Spanish reports are made up as to the number of the enemy killed and wounded in a certain battle. It is simply this: The Spanish commander ascertains how much ammunition was used, figures how many Cubans that number of cartridges ought to have killed and wounded, and sends it in to Havana as a report of fact."

"They would not take the trouble to

make so elaborate a calculation," sneered Juan. "Plain lying is much easier to a Spaniard."

"We are nearing the bank. A few good strokes, now, comrade."

Lusty swimming soon ended in wading. Shaking the water from their clothing, they stepped up on land.

"It will do no harm to be quiet," whispered Hal. "Remember that we are still within the probable Spanish lines."

"At all events, let us get in motion. That drenching is almost enough to give us the yellow fever."

"Ugh! Do not talk about it. I feel contempt for Spaniards, but the very name of yellow jack fills me with terror."

Only a dozen steps had they gone forward when something moving ahead brought them to a stop.

Grasping their revolvers, each darted noiselessly behind a tree to await developments.

"Is that you, senors?" called a voice.

"It must be Ensenada," murmured Hal.

"It is no other," answered he who had hailed them. "And you——"

"Are your friends," replied Hal, unconcernedly, as he stepped out from the tree. "Senor, you must have hurried."

"I did, in truth," came the quick answer. "I was resolved not to miss you. It was about here that I calculated that you would swim ashore."

"You seem to have been very confident that we would reach this bank."

"Why not?" demanded Senor Ensenada. "I knew your grit and resolution. As for the rest, I trusted to bad Spanish marksmanship. I knew that if those soldiers aimed at you they would miss you."

"Oh, come, now," protested Hal. "Not all Spaniards are bad shots. I have been in battles against them where their shooting was much too clever for my comfort. But how did you manage to cross without being detected?"

"It was easy enough. After I left you I rode like the wind, for this good beast was fresh. Not until I had gone nearly a mile to the south, I rode this horse into the water and swam over. Then I rode back here, judging your track to be in the

path of the gunboat, whose light I could see. And here I waited for you."

"Now let us push on quickly," urged Hal. "We have some distance to go before we are out of the Spanish lines. After that we have a long journey to General Gomez, to whom, I believe, we are carrying news that is worth a half a dozen battles."

They set out, plodding on doggedly. The rain had ceased by this time, which fact added a little to their comfort.

Senor Ensenada, whose recent illness and late exposure had left him weak, was persuaded to keep in the saddle, Hal and Juan plodding on either side of him.

For three miles Ensenada kept on without complaint. Now he halted, explaining plaintively:

"Gentlemen, I cannot go much further without a cigarette. Wait until I roll one."

"Out of what?" demanded Juan.

"I have papers and tobacco with me."

"Both of which," retorted Juan, must be nearly as wet as the river itself."

"I could dry both quickly if either of you gentlemen have sufficient matches."

"We have, but unfortunately the matches are as wet as anything else."

"That is true," sighed the planter, disconsolately.

He started the horse as if to go on again, but our hero interrupted him.

"Wait one moment, senor. If matches are all you need, I can make as many of mine burn as you wish."

"Yes, you can," smiled Juan, as Hal drew out of a pocket a thoroughly soaked lucifer.

"Can't I make that burn? Just watch me."

Drying the wood as well as he could between his fingers, Maynard next rubbed the soaked brimstone end through his hair with a brisk motion.

Scratch! The match flared up, burning freely.

"Diablo!" uttered Juan. "Is that witchcraft?"

"Not in the least. But my hair has already dried. In that hair there is enough electricity to quickly dry the match. It is a trick that never fails."

"Senor," came from the delighted

Ensenada, "if you will quickly work that trick on a few more matches, I will get everything ready for my cigarette."

While Hal was fixing a small handful of matches, Ensenada plucked a few green leaves.

On one of these he placed two cigarette papers.

"Now, a little fire beneath this leaf will dry the paper," he suggested.

"Juan, my dear fellow," asked Hal, "be kind enough to strike the matches. Then, by the aid of their light, I will examine a little find of mine."

While Juan complied, Hal drew out of an inside pocket a long wallet.

"Eh, mi amigo?" insinuated Ramirez.

"Yes," grinned the young American, "it belonged to the Spanish colonel. As I struck him, and he fell, this dropped out of one of his pockets. I picked it up, as you may imagine, but not in order to play the thief. It struck me that it might contain some papers that would be useful to General Gomez."

"Look through it quickly," begged the Cuban captain, giving so much of his attention to what Hal was doing that Ensenada was forced to remonstrate:

"Captain Ramirez, if you do not use more care you will set my drying papers afire."

"First of all," discovered Hal, "here is some Spanish paper money. It is pretty worthless stuff, but perhaps it will buy food for some of the starving Cubans in Havana. There appears to be about a thousand pesetas of it. Permit me to put it in your pocket, Juan, and at your convenience you can find a way to get it into the hands of the Junta at Havana."

Hal continued his investigation.

"A few private papers," he explained. "Mostly unpaid bills contracted in the towns where the colonel and his regiment stopped. Eh—hullo!"

Lieutenant Hal's tone was gleeful.

"This is rich," he murmured. "Nothing more nor less than the key to the cipher code used by Spanish military commanders in telegraphing."

"Eh?" gasped Juan, leaning eagerly forward. "Now, if we could only get hold of a few recent military dispatches in that code."

"You have done it, captain!" cried Ensenada, in a rueful voice.

"Eh? What——" responded Juan, half turning to the planter.

"You have set fire to my cigarette papers, which were all but dry."

"Oh, as to that," responded Juan, heartlessly, "let it rest until we have better scanned this wonderful code."

Without a word of remonstrance, the planter possessed himself of some of the matches, proceeding to do his own work of drying while the two young officers, burning other matches, began to look over the code.

"It is a very simple affair," pronounced Hal. "With an hour's study I could commit it to memory."

"All but those telegraph dots and dashes," sighed Juan. "It would make my head ache to learn them."

"But, you see, I have already done some telegraphy, up on the plantation with my former employer."

"Let us hurry on with this prize, mi amigo. Santa Maria! General Gomez would have given me a colonel's commission in return for that code if I had been lucky enough to find it."

"Take it," said Hal, thrusting the wallet at Ramirez.

"But it was not I who found it, mi amigo," exclaimed the Cuban captain, drawing back.

"It would be of little use to me, since Gomez can offer me no reward."

"Thank you, mi amigo, but I prefer that my promotion should be based on my own actions."

This was said so decisively that Hal replaced the wallet in his pocket.

"Senors," declared the planter, in a voice of relief, "I have two cigarettes ready."

"Then let us proceed to serve Cuba," smiled Juan, with a tinge of mild sarcasm in his voice.

But the planter was too contented to tort. In the same fashion as before they jogged along, covering another three miles.

Coming out of the forest for an instant, they found themselves in a narrow road. The familiar whirring sound greeted their ears.

"Telegraph poles and wires—the same that we passed this afternoon," commented Hal.

"I had a thought in mind then," answered Ramirez, "that upon our return we would cut the wires. This will be an excellent time to do it."

"Fully a dozen wires," observed Hal, looking up at the cables that appeared outlined against the now starlit sky. "It would take us some time."

"And be well worth the time," protested Ramirez.

"But if there is a telegraph station near, the operator might understand what had happened as soon as the first wire was cut."

"Even then?"

"Suppose that the nearest station is very near, and protected by a large body of troops. They would be upon us in no time."

"That is true. Well, then?"

"Why, what we ought to do is as clear as daylight," pursued Hal. "Senor Ensenada can ride up the road; you and I will go down the road on foot. After we have gone a half a mile in both directions without finding a station, it will be safe to return here and sever every wire."

Nodding gravely, Ensenada turned his horse's head in the direction indicated.

"He is prompt, mi amigo, that we cannot do better than to imitate him."

As Hal and Juan stole off in the darkness both kept their eyes and ears decidedly on the alert.

They had covered about a half mile, and were on the point of wheeling around to return when through the night there came a sound that made their faces glow.

Click-click! clicketty-click! click!

"The telegraph station," whispered Juan, stealing after Hal, who, on tiptoe, was making swift progress toward the building now dimly discernible down the road. "Come back, mi amigo. It will be safe for us to cut the wires at the point where we had planned."

But Hal Maynard, who could now hear the sharp rattle of the busy telegraph sounder, stood transfigured with delight.

"Come back," urged Juan, once more.

"We'll cut the wires."

But Maynard turned on his chum almost indignantly.

"No; by Jupiter, you won't!"

CHAPTER VII.

DE ORTO THE TREACHEROUS.

"I thought we were to cut the wires," insisted Ramirez.

"So we were; but I have thought of a better trick. Perhaps we can use them."

"Oh!" exclaimed Juan, without comprehending.

"I deciphered the message which just went over the wire," went on Hal. "It read, 'Captain Louis De Orto and his scouts are here. They have important information to communicate to Colonel Deseva in cipher as soon as Colonel Deseva reaches your office. Send this message to him at once.'"

"Colonel Deseva?" repeated Ramirez, his eyes shining. "Doubtless he is the rascal whom you knocked on the head with your pistol."

"That was my thought. Captain De Orto has doubtless been scouting, and the information he has to send must be out of the usual if he resorts to the cipher code. Therefore we must know what that message is."

"Are you going to write it down as it ticks off on the sounder, and afterward translate it by the aid of Colonel Deseva's key to the cipher?"

"For two seconds that thought was in my mind. But why allow De Orto to send his message at all?"

"Better still, mi amigo," approved Juan, eagerly.

"Scouts are generally mounted. We can easily judge their number if we can get near enough to count their horses."

"Decidedly," thrilled Juan, "this kind of an enterprise is to my liking."

"Come on, then, but remember that the breaking of a twig under our shoes is likely to cost us our lives."

No darker place could have been found out of doors that night. The station itself stood well in the shelter of tall trees. On three sides were dense jungle.

It would be more good fortune than anything else that would make it possible to advance without detection by a sentinel.

And good fortune it proved, for the two young officers, halting suddenly to listen, found themselves unexpectedly within three feet of such a sentry.

Only a bush separated the Spaniard from his foes.

Standing with his rifle resting across the hollow of his left arm, the soldier was vigilantly on the watch, except that he was watching in the wrong direction for danger.

Quivering, Hal paused a second to steady himself.

Next, his revolver glistened within foot of the soldier's head.

"A sound, my man, will cost you your life!"

At that startling hail, the Spaniard wheeled about like a flash, in his dismay almost dropping his rifle.

"No noise, if you would live!" warned Hal, once more.

He had a "clean drop" on the foe. None but the most courageous man would dare disobey such well-backed orders.

But the Spaniard proved to be a man of just this sort of courage.

Instantly as soon as he comprehended the nature of the danger, his lips parted.

Ere he could utter a sound, Juan brought down his machete hilt on the soldier's head from behind.

Not even a groan came from the prostrate one. A man who received such a

CLIF FARADAY IN ACTION—READ TRUE BLUE.

gly, forcible blow could be depended upon to remain silent for some minutes. Nevertheless, Hal decided to be upon the safe side.

"Watch him, Juan," he counseled. "I will do the looking about."

Getting a fresh grip upon his machete, Juan stood at his post, watching the fellow as a tiger would its intended prey.

Only two minutes passed before Hal was back.

"There are five horses over yonder," he reported. "With this rascal out of the fight, it means four men left to fight, with possibly the telegraph operator added."

"If you have a handkerchief to spare, mi amigo, tie this fellow's feet together, while I do as much for his hands."

This divided task quickly accomplished, Juan also slipped a gag into the fellow's mouth.

"Now, mi amigo, if you know where the other enemies are——"

"I caught a glimpse of them through the open door," whispered back Hal.

"Then lead me to them."

"Your pistol is ready?"

"For five shots in three seconds, if necessary."

"Very well; but don't use it if you can help it. If it becomes necessary to use it, then shoot as fast as you can, and shoot to kill!"

Juan nodded. Having as good reason as he had to hate the Spaniards, such advice was more than welcome.

Reaching the side of the building on which the door was situated, Hal threw himself down upon his knees, creeping forward a step at a time.

Close at his heels came Juan.

Through the open door of the station came enough light to show them the way. With his head close to the ground,

Lieutenant Maynard reached the centre of the doorway.

Inside, almost out of view, sat the operator at his table.

Back of him paced the Spanish captain, De Orto, a young and handsome-looking fellow, who, despite the hard riding he had already done that day, looked almost as neat as if he had but just emerged from his dressing-room.

Near the door, bunched on the floor, were three Spanish privates.

Lounging with their backs against the wall, they sat smoking, just out of swift reach of their carbines, which lay beyond their feet.

While Hal lay thus peering, the instrument inside began clicking.

This message, like the last he had heard, was in every-day Spanish—an informal message between two operators.

It read, translated:

"Tell Captain De Orto that Colonel Deseva has been sent for. It is expected that he will be here within ten minutes."

Captain De Orto listened to this message as the operator called it off.

"My cipher message is all ready, the instant you receive word that my colonel is at the other station," spoke the captain.

He held up a sheet of paper.

"Mine!" smiled Hal, grimly. "That is, if the row ends my way."

The "row" came quicker than he had expected.

Glancing around suddenly, De Orto saw two pairs of eager eyes regarding him from near the ground outside.

"Car-r-r-rajo! To arms like lightning, my men!"

Whipping out his sword, he pointed to Hal and Juan, now rising swiftly to their knees.

"The man who stirs will be dead in one second!" vibrated Maynard, hotly,

ARE YOU A PATRIOTIC BOY? READ TRUE BLUE.

leveling his revolver at the startled group.

"Juan!"

"Yes, mi amigo!"

"If the soldiers move, fire three shots swiftly enough to kill them all."

"Santa Maria! Won't I, though!" grated the Cuban.

But the soldiers did not stir.

"Eying alternately their guns—so near, and yet so far!—they hesitated with commendable prudence to reach for their weapons.

"Captain," quivered Lieutenant Hal, "I must ask for your sword. I will not take it directly, though, but will ask you to drop it to the floor."

Hal spoke coolly enough. With the three soldiers out of the fight he felt confident of the captain, upon whom he had taken sure aim.

But De Orto, after the first moment of dazed surprise, glared angrily and fearlessly at the young American officer.

Click! went the telegraph instrument.

"Operator," warned Hal, coldly, "I give you my word that if you try to send so much as a letter over the wire, I will kill you when we have attended to the others."

"Senor," protested the operator, who sat just out of the line of the view, "I did not touch the key. It was the operator at the other station who started to talk with me, and I shut him off."

"Liar!" cried Hal. "I am too familiar with the instrument for you to trick me thus. Another effort will end your life."

Captain De Orto here broke in sullenly:

"You have the best of me, senor. I surrender."

"If life is sweet, you are a sensible man," quoth Hal.

"Do not taunt me," was the haughty answer.

"I am not taunting. I commend you."

"What are your orders, senor?"

"Drop your sword."

Clang! De Orto's blade rang sharply against the floor of the station.

"What next, senor?"

"Go to the further end of the room," ordered Hal, advancing nearer to the door.

With a stiff military salute, the captain turned as if to obey.

"Face me, and walk backward," ordered Lieutenant Maynard, sternly.

Like a flash Captain De Orto wheeled around again.

With a movement swift as thought he had drawn his revolver.

An evil gleam shot in the Spaniard's eyes as he leveled and fired full at our hero.

Third Part.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNCLE SAM'S "SPECIAL."

As the pistol rang out Hal fell.

It was only to his knees, however, for the second before the shot came our hero had divined the coming treachery.

Had he remained standing, the bullet would have passed through his head.

Crack! Hal's prompt bullet was aimed at De Orto's forehead.

Instead, the missile broke the captain's jaw, tearing a hole in his right cheek.

"Treachery never pays!" rang Hal's passionate voice.

It was punctuated by De Orto's second shot, which cut off a lock of the American's hair, leaving also a narrow track of blood along the skin.

Hal's second shot was almost as quick, tearing a hole through the Spaniard's neck.

His third followed before De Orto could fire again. It struck the Spaniard

"Remember the Maine!" Read True Blue, the New Naval Weekly.

just under the nose, inflicting a ghastly wound and bringing forth a smothered cry of acute agony.

Right after De Orto's third shot, which, owing to blinded aim, struck the doorpost, Hal sent in his fourth shot.

It struck just where the young American officer intended it should, drilling a hole between the Spaniard's eyes, and killing him instantly.

Coolly lowering his pistol, Hal turned to Juan.

That young Cuban, betraying not the least excitement, held his own revolver in such fashion as to effectively cover the three privates.

"You see, my men," rang Hal's voice, "how poorly treachery pays. Had you officer kept his word of surrender, he would now be alive, with only a brief captivity to look forward to."

Going nearer to the men, Hal used one of his feet to gradually kick the guns further from them.

"To put you out of the way of fatal temptation," he announced, grimly.

Then he turned to see what the operator was doing. That worthy, displaying a sickly smile, sat as if glued to his chair, though trembling in every limb.

"You will not make us any trouble, I hope," demanded Hal, jeeringly.

"I, senor?" cried the operator. "Such a course is very far from my thoughts. I have no notion for sharing the fate of the poor captain, who, may the saints grant him peace in the next world, was bullying me only five minutes ago."

Keeping one eye, notwithstanding, on the operator, Hal walked to where Captain De Orto's body lay, and picked up the written dispatch which the captain had dropped just before his fatal attempt at treachery.

"I will read this at my leisure," mused the young American. "Juan, dear boy,

will you oblige me with a pair of horses? Probably a length or two of the road, but handy just now."

"Certainly, mi amigo," said Hal, "tell me that you have taken the murderous Spain under the thumb of your revolver."

"I have them well covered."

Rising, Juan passed quickly into the outer darkness. He was soon back dragging something after him.

It proved to be the sentry whom they had bound. By this time the fellow was conscious again, though he appeared too dazed from the effects of the fearful blow he had received to realize much of what was passing.

While Lieutenant Maynard mounted guard, the doughty young Cuban Captain accomplished the tying up. One of the soldier's blouse cut up into strips supplied gags enough to stop the tongues of all hands.

Nor did the operator escape the fate of the soldiers. He was permitted to sit in a chair, however, while the privates were forced to rest content with flat postures on the floor.

"Bah! The Spaniard's eyes, though half-closed, have a treacherous look, even in death," declared Ramirez, after a brief, disgusted look at what was left of De Orto. "It will give me the blues if he stays here."

And Juan, finding a closet at the back of the office, dragged the Spanish carcass into it, closing the door on it.

"Now, mi amigo, what are you doing?" queried the Cuban, for Hal, seated at the operator's table, seemed absorbed in work with pen, ink and paper.

"Translating the cipher message which that scoundrel had ready for transmission," voiced Hal, without looking up.

Picking up one of the captured car-

22
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s

leveling him and standing just outside.

"Juan!" some minutes he stood, alert and

"Yes."

"If there is no village within a mile of

"No," he mused. "Probably even that

deserted. Nevertheless, it is well to be

careful, for one cannot tell how far the

sound of shots will travel on a still

night."

He stood at his post until a low signal

whistle from Hal called him inside.

Hal's eyes were gleaming; his eyes

looked hard and stern.

"It is well we stopped this message,"

he announced. "Read the message which

I have just deciphered, by the aid of Col-

onel Deseva's own code."

Juan picked up Hal's translation, his

own face taking on an ugly look as he

read through the infamous dispatch:

"From Captain Luis De Orto to Col-

onel Deseva: I have the honor to report

that I and my scouts have discovered the

location of the concealed Cuban field hos-

pital which you ordered me to find. It is

situated in a deep ravine, one mile north-

east of the main buildings of La Casa

Blanca plantation." (Here followed more

explicit directions for finding the spot).

"It is about ten miles from this station;

contains some three hundred wounded in-

surgents, twelve doctors and twenty

nurses, and only twenty-five guards!"

"I am almost glad that I was per-

mitted to kill the infamous scoundrel,"

panted Hal, as Juan, with white face and

twitching lips put the paper down.

"I am sorry," commented Ramirez,

huskily, "that you did not do as much

for Colonel Deseva when you had the

chance."

as De Orto did. It is too bad, for at the

least it means that we must take them

with us as prisoners. And what will be

come of them, if our Cubans learn that it

was they who were to pilot a regiment of

the enemy to a massacre of wounded

men?"

While it seems almost too horrible for

credence, it was not one or a score of in-

stances in which Spain's soldiers have

butchered the helpless inmates of Cuban

hospitals.

Not only the guards, doctors and

wounded men have been put to the

sword.

Cuban women, serving in that holies

of capacities, nursing the wounded and

dying, have been as relentlessly

massacred.

Cases of this kind are too numerous

and too well supported by credible testi-

mony, in the history of the Cuban revo-

lution, to need more than passing refer-

ence here.

Hal and Juan eyed each other for some

moments, the horror which their

thoughts caused to two upright, honest

natures, being plainly written on the

face of each.

"It will be too bad, indeed," burst

forth Hal, impetuously, "if scoundrels

who can plan such an outrage are to be

allowed to go free. After all, had we not

better make the effort to get these pris-

oners to the Cuban camp?"

"If we do not," replied Juan, spicily

"I shall be ashamed to go back myself."

Thump! went Hal's fist on the opera-

tor's table as he sprang up, exclaiming:

"Juan, all the regiment that contem-

plated such an outrage is equally guilty

Why can we not turn the whole command

over to the mercy of General Gomez?"

"Why, indeed?" cried Juan, his eyes

sparkling.

Then of a sudden his face grew sober

"No; it seems impossible. If the Spaniards start for the coast, it matters not how fast we ride. They will be out of the reach of Gomez before he can get his troops on the scene."

Hal's eyes were blazing now, like tiny bonfires.

"Deseva's regiment must not go to the east," he panted.

"And how are we to stop them, migo? Can we, two officers, hope to stop a whole regiment?"

"No; but we can decoy them."

"And how is it to be done?"

For answer Hal pointed to the key and sounder.

Juan began to beget a glimmering of the idea.

"You hope to use the Spanish wire in some way?"

"It is not a Spanish wire," asserted Hal, promptly.

Unpinning a small American flag from his blouse, he walked to the doorway, hanging up there the tiny edition of Old Glory.

Turning to his comrade, his eyes dancing with the audacity of his plan, he rattled on swiftly:

"Juan, dear comrade, this station has been captured by American and Cuban forces. The flag proclaims this to be an American possession, and this station is no longer Spanish. The telegraph wire itself has passed under American dominion."

"So that——" broke in Ramirez, eagerly.

"This telegraph wire is now Uncle Sam's Special!"

"Hurrah!" vented Juan.

"Now," begged Hal, "keep your eyes on the prisoners, and also on the doorway. As you love me, don't say another word until necessary. I shall be ear-deep

in the code that we borrowed from Colonel Deseva."

And Hal sat down to the desk, first penciling the message that he intended to send.

While writing, he frequently consulted his military map of the province.

No sooner was the message ready than he seized the code taken from Deseva, and then began the task of putting the message into cipher.

It was finished at last. Mopping his brow, he looked up to smile at Juan.

Clicketty-click-click! The call had come over the wire from Colonel Deseva's operator.

CHAPTER IX.

"CAPTAIN BRANO"—DARE-DEVIL.

"A message for Captain De Orto."

These were the first words clicked over the wires.

With steady hand, Hal wired back:

"Captain De Orto is here."

Now came the message:

"Colonel Deseva was injured while doing his duty. He will be on the sick list for two or three days. ('I'll bet he will!' commented Hal, grimly.) Lieutenant Colonel Banderio commands the regiment in the interim. He is here, at the office, ready to receive Captain De Orto's cipher message."

Having clicked off this news, the sounder remained silent.

"Now for the great stroke," murmured our hero, tremulously.

Seating himself at the captured instrument, Hal ticked off the message destined to lure the Spanish army to disaster.

He sent slowly but distinctly.

At the other end the operator took the message without a break.

Back came the message that the dispatch had been properly received.

"Now," muttered Hal, rising from his chair, "now for the real work of the night!"

Click-click!

Bending over, with thumb and finger resting on the key, Hal returned the signal.

Now came this message:

"Lieutenant Colonel Banderio compliments Captain De Orto on his success. Captain De Orto is hereby ordered, with his squad, to join the regiment on its march."

Hal uttered an exclamation of disappointment.

"What is wrong, mi amigo?" demanded Juan.

Hal repeated to him the message.

"That is serious," muttered the Cuban.

"I have given them a route," went on Hal, "that will take them by six miles to the south of here. But if Captain De Orto and his men do not join the regiment, Banderio is likely to suspect. The least failure for our plans is likely to defeat them."

"Can you not beg off for Captain De Orto?" proposed Ramirez. "Assure Banderio that the captain and his four men are at the point of exhaustion."

"I'll try it," muttered Hal, once more seating himself at the instrument, and sending this message:

"Captain De Orto presents his compliments to Lieutenant Colonel Banderio. The captain would represent that both his men and their horses are unfit for further travel for hours. Will Lieutenant Colonel Banderio consent to the captain and his squad resting for a few hours?"

Having sent this, Hal waited anxiously for the answer.

It was not long in coming, and read to this effect:

"Captain De Orto is begged to use his own best judgment as to the condition of

his squad. But either the captain or one of his men will be obliged to report to the regiment at the crossing of the river as it is indispensable to have a proper guide."

For Juan's information, our hero pencilled this despatch as it ticked from the sounder.

Ramirez read it with a blank face.

"We are as badly off as before," he grunted.

"It seems like it," muttered disappointed Hal.

But suddenly his face brightened.

"Hold on! By thunder, I believe we'll get them yet!"

His hand travelled back to the key.

This was the message he sent:

"Captain Brano, of the Valencia regiment, has escaped with us from confinement at the Cuban Hospital. He knows every foot of the way. Having made the journey but one way, he is in better condition than myself or any of my men. He begs Lieutenant Colonel Banderio to accept him as a guide. I can thoroughly recommend Brano, who is a dashing, intelligent officer.

"(Signed) "De Orto."

Hardly had Hal ceased sending, when this answer came back:

"Brano is accepted. Tell him to meet us at the fording of the river."

"You have some new mischief plotted?" asked Juan.

"Have I?" mimicked Hal, his face glowing. "Slightly. I am Brano!"

"What?" Juan seemed on the point of exploding with curiosity.

"Certainly," laughed Hal. "Am I not brown enough to pass for a Spaniard? Your Cuban sun has done that much for me."

"But your uniform?"

"I shall entrust to you."

"And yourself?"

CLIF FARADAY IN ACTION—READ TRUE BLUE.

"I shall strip the corpse of De Orto, in under closet. His Spanish uniform must cover me to-night. I hate to wear it, but they need's law."

"He is a shorter man than you, mi amigo. It will be seen at once that his uniform was never made for you."

"I will soon show you that you are wrong," replied Lieutenant Maynard.

Wheeling, he crossed the room to the closet, shuddering, in spite of himself, at the thought of the ghastly object it contained.

But need respects no laws, as he himself had said.

With Juan's help, they dragged out the body of the dead captain, quickly deducing it of the uniform that had covered it.

"Now comes the bitterest part of the business," sighed Hal. "It is hard to have to pull off Uncle Sam's uniform in the enemy's country."

With Juan's help, our hero arrayed himself in the hated uniform.

The trousers legs were five inches too short.

"But wait until the riding boots are on," quoth Hal, "and who shall know the difference?"

The boots on, it was as he had said. Clicketty-click-click!

"Now what the deuce does that fool at the other end want?" grumbled the young American officer.

But, as soon as he had given the signal, and the message began to come, our hero's face assumed a look of delight.

"It must be something good," suggested Juan.

"It is," laughed young Maynard. Banderio says that neither he nor any of his officers know Captain Brano, and that therefore, if he is to guide the regiment, a description of him must be wired once."

"Excellent!" quivered Juan.

"I should say so."

Hal's face was a smiling one as he once more seated himself at the table.

Click-click! chattered the instrument for two full minutes.

"There," he muttered, rising, "I think that description of myself Brano does me full justice. Juan, dear boy, I have given every detail of my personal description that I know myself, even to the details of my beauty."

"And now, mi amigo, since I am sure that the part you have assigned to me is to ride like a whirlwind to General Gomez' camp——"

"It is," confirmed our hero, nodding.

"Therefore I beg you to give me my full orders at once, as every moment on the way that I can gain will count."

"Here is a translation of the cipher that De Orto was ready to send. That gives the real location of the Cuban hospital camp. Here is a copy, in Spanish, of the message that I sent Banderio in cipher. My message gives a location of the Cuban hospital camp at a spot ten miles from the real one. I have also sent Banderio word, in De Orto's name, that the camp is a big supply depot in which are great stores of arms and ammunition. That will make the Spaniards simply crazy to capture the camp. Take both messages to General Gomez, and tell him how it comes that I am to be a guide to the Spanish."

"Good-by, mi amigo," murmured Juan, rather brokenly, as he folded the papers up, placed them in his pocket, and then grasped our hero's hand.

"Why good-by?" smiled Hal. "No one now with the regiment has seen me. I shall not be recognized."

"I speak advisedly, mi amigo. I had hoped that you and I would both live through this campaign. But, since you

have elected to lead the Spanish troops into such a trap, have no hope that they will let you escape alive. I would go myself in the role of Captain Brano, did I not know that, once you have outlined such a plan, it would be impossible to get you to change your mind."

"Quite impossible," spoke Hal, quietly. "I am going to hog the danger."

"That is why I say good-by."

"Well, then, good-by, old comrade," spoke Lieutenant Hal, with deep feeling, as he again grasped Ramirez's warm hand. "Heaven bless you, Juan, but, God willing, we'll mess together again within seven or eight hours."

"In all this excitement," suddenly spoke Juan, "we have come near forgetting Senor Ensenada."

"Here I am, senors," voiced a soft voice at the door, and the planter entered.

"I became worried, when I waited minute after minute without seeing either of you," explained the planter. "At last, when I could endure the suspense no longer I came cautiously down the road in this direction. I have been near the building for some time, but have been reconnoitering. It was only now, when I heard your voices, that I could believe you were both safe in here. But what has happened?"

Click-click! rattled the sounder. It was a signal from the other office.

Juan held up his hand to enjoin silence upon the planter, while Hal answered the signal.

Hal listened to the next message with deep satisfaction, then, turning to his friends, remarked:

"The Spanish cavalry has started."

"And so have Gomez's messengers!" cried Juan, thrusting his arm through Ensenada's and drawing him through the door.

CHAPTER X.

THE HOSPITAL RAIDERS.

Left alone, Hal looked around the room in which the stirring prologue of the new drama had been enacted.

"Juan did not forget my uniform," murmured the American. "God bless the dear old chap. I hope I shall live to see him again!"

A sound outside told our hero that Ramirez was helping himself to one of the Spanish horses.

Next, the ringing of hoofs told him that the captain and Ensenada were off on their hard ride to Gomez's camp.

For a few minutes Hal busied himself with examining the knots of the cords that held the Spanish soldiers and the genuine operator prisoners.

"They can't get away," he murmured, inwardly. "Nevertheless, I won't leave here until the last moment."

Frequently consulting his watch, our hero paced back and forth.

"It won't be best to delay any longer," he decided, at last.

Going outside, he selected one of the remaining horses, leaped into saddle, and rode off at an easy canter.

As soon as he struck a better part of the road, he increased the animal's speed to a smart gallop.

In as good time as it could be done, he covered the six miles to the ford.

He was none too soon, for, as he reached this point along the river, the jingling of accoutrements on the other side came clearly to his ears across the still water.

Then a number of wading figures ap-

A NAVAL CADET UNDER FIRE—SEE TRUE BLUE.

peared, men and horses swimming as they struck the deeper main channel of the river.

"Hardly a sergeant's guard of them," mused Hal. "Probably the advance, sent over to make sure that the passage is safe from attack."

This proved to be the case, and, in a few minutes Hal found himself saluted by a young Spanish lieutenant who waded up to the bank at the head of the soldiers.

"Captain Brano?" inquired the lieutenant.

"Yes," came from Hal, as he returned the salute.

"You have seen none of the enemy?"

"Not a one."

"Then I will so signal to Colonel Banderio."

Lighting a small lantern, the Spanish lieutenant began to signal with it.

Hal watched him for a moment, then turned to look at the silent Spanish troopers.

It was a curious sensation for the young American to be thus serving with the enemy, even though that service was only in the nature of a spy's work, for the purpose of leading the enemy to destruction.

But the Spaniards did not appear for a moment to suspect our hero.

He was accredited to their colonel, was eagerly expected by the latter, and wore Spanish uniform. Why should they suspect him?

But it might be very different with colonel Banderio.

Hal was well aware that his accent was not of the purest Castilian type. His speech was slightly tinged with the Cuban accent.

"I'll be more careful how I speak Spanish to-night than I ever was in my life before," the young American grimly promised himself.

It was not long before the main column of cavalry began to move over through the stream.

With them came Banderio and his staff.

The last of Maynard's trepidation disappeared when he found himself talking with that officer.

"You are well recommended to me, captain," Banderio exclaimed, graciously. "Yet you are young to be a captain."

"I am aware that I look boyish, my colonel. My youthfulness must be due to a clear conscience, since I am twenty-six years old."

"Indeed, captain? You surprise me. But ride by my side, for I have many questions to ask you about this Cuban pest hole that we are to exterminate in the morning."

Fortunate, indeed, was the darkness for upon hearing the Spaniard speak so lightly of the dastardly work in hand, our hero could not keep his eyes from flashing angrily.

As soon as Maynard could control his voice sufficiently to speak, he gave the Spanish colonel a circumstantial account of the supposed Cuban hospital that greatly delighted the commanding officer.

Certainly Hal did not forget to "lay it on thickly" when he spoke of the pretended arms, ammunition and other supplies which had been secreted by the Cubans at the place to be raided.

"It will be a glorious morning's work!" cried Banderio, gleefully rubbing his hands.

"It surely will," responded our hero, adding under his breath:

"For the Cubans!"

"Is the road a rough one, captain?"

"A very rough one, colonel."

"You would advise me, then, to move my horses slowly?"

"If you would have the animals in any

HAVE YOU READ TRUE BLUE?

kind of condition, colonel, when you get at the end of the ride."

"What speed would you suggest, captain, from your knowledge of the country?"

"In places, colonel, the road is very fair, but, on the whole, I would urge you not to make the horses travel at a better gait than three and a half miles an hour."

"I shall take your advice, captain, since you have already traveled over the road."

Hal and Banderio remained chatting until the entire column had crossed the river.

"Ride on my left, captain," requested the lieutenant-colonel. "And, since you are to be the guide, we will place ourselves at the head of the regiment. Captain, a strange thing happened to-night. We had camped at the house of a planter named Ensenada. His conduct made us suspect that he might be willing to aid the Cubans, so Colonel Deseva ordered him under arrest."

"Now comes the strange part of it. While Ensenada was in the house, under guard, he was reached by two Cuban spies who set him at liberty. They must have been both audacious and clever rascals to succeed in getting through our lines."

"Audacious, indeed," voiced Hal.

"These two spies were discovered in the room next to the library by our colonel. Colonel Deseva was badly injured in the encounter that resulted. Ensenada is believed to have utterly escaped, but the two Cubans were followed as far as the bank of the river, where they were shot."

"And killed, I hope," suggested Hal, dryly.

"Killed, beyond any question. Still, the escape of Ensenada fills us with ap-

prehension. He may have very important news that he is bearing to the enemy. It was unfortunate that we could not over-haul him.

"There is another curious feature of the case, captain. Colonel Deseva declares that one of his assailants—the one who struck him, in fact—was in the uniform of a United States officer."

"Surely," ejaculated Hal, innocently, "there are no United States soldiers on the island?"

"On the contrary, captain," rejoined Banderio, with a snort of disgust. "It seems that there is a Yankee lieutenant and a squad of men at the camp of Gomez. They have come to try our mettle, I suppose, and so far fortune has favored the rascals. I would give much, captain, if I could meet that Yankee pig. Maynard is his name, I am told."

"I sincerely hope, colonel, that you will meet this Yankee 'pig,'" rejoined Hal, with so much warmth that, had Banderio been at all suspicious of his companion, he would have been put on his guard.

"Oh, if I do not meet him," laughed Banderio, "some other competent Spanish officer will have that pleasure. Bah! What a delightful and easy time we shall have of whipping these Yankees with yardsticks, if they dare come to Cuba!"

In the light of early day a column of cavalry appeared on the topmost spur of a line of hills.

Yet the dense woods favored their apparent object, which was to pass over this spur without being observed at a distance.

Once over the ridge, the line began to wind down reaching at last a ravine of rather narrow width.

Part of the way there was room for six soldiers to ride abreast, though very

BEST NAVAL STORIES FOR BOYS - TRUE BLUE.

shortly the thoroughfare became so narrow that but four men could ride in file.

"Ugh! It would be a nasty place for an ambush," shuddered Banderio, glancing up at the hills, bristling with bushes and jungle, that lined the ravine on either side.

"We may meet such an ambush, colonel," came quietly from Hal.

"What do you say, Captain Brano?"

"But it will be a child's affair, since the hospital guards do not number over twenty-five."

"And what sort of men, in your estimation, are these guards?"

"Well," replied Hal, hypocritically, with a shrug of his shoulders, "while they are not cowards, what can twenty-five Cubans do against more than eight hundred Spanish horsemen?"

"What, indeed?" jeered Banderio. "Still, I shall be as cautious as possible. How much further, captain, is the hospital?"

"It is less than a mile from here. Following this ravine will bring you straight to it. So, colonel, as I am not needed here any longer, I volunteer my services to you in another way."

"Speak, captain."

"With your permission, colonel, I will ride ahead, to reconnoitre, and see if the way is quite clear for your brave men."

Though Lieutenant Hal appeared cool, he waited with the greatest anxiety for the Spaniard's reply, on which, he was convinced, his life hung.

"Captain," came the reply, after a moment, "I am sensible of the loyalty and bravery which prompt your offer. Yet the performance of such a service seems unnecessary."

"And you decline, colonel?"

"Not so. I deem your offer a good one, because your example will teach my men what Spanish bravery should mean. You

are liable to lose your life, captain, but it will be well lost. Go!"

Saluting, Hal put spurs to his horse and rode forward.

He was soon a good distance ahead of the column, and gaining upon the advance guard of thirty men.

He reached it, passed it.

"In a minute more," breathed Hal, "I shall be safe!"

"Viva Cuba libre!"

The hillsides rang with that stirring yell. It was followed at once by a crashing volley from the hills on either side.

"Now for it!" vented Hal, digging spurs into his horse.

But Colonel Banderio possessed a quick mind.

In a flash, he understood that, in some way, he had been tricked by a spy.

"Fire, my men!" he roared. "Fire on that accursed, escaping spy!"

The van guard heard. Though under heavy fire themselves, they leveled their rifles as one man, each taking aim at Lieutenant Hal Maynard.

The American's horse fell. His hat was shot from his head. One Mauser bullet tore the skin on the top of his shoulder. All about him Spanish bullets hissed through the leaves and twigs.

But Hal, the instant his horse fell, took to his legs, crouching and running at the same time.

Another volley rang out, projectiles thudding the earth all about him.

Hal saw a jungle ahead, raced for it.

Parting the branches, he darted inside.

"Mi amigo!"

"Juan, dear boy!"

"Stand aside, mi amigo. The brave fellows with me are about to answer the shots that were fired at you."

Passing by some fifty Cubans whom the jungle sheltered, Hal Maynard went to the rear.

He had done his part.

Nor were the Cubans long in emulating his example.

Led by three of Gomez's best officers, they made short, decisive work of Banderio's hospital-hunting regiment.

Six hundred Spanish dead and two hundred prisoners was the record of that morning's work.

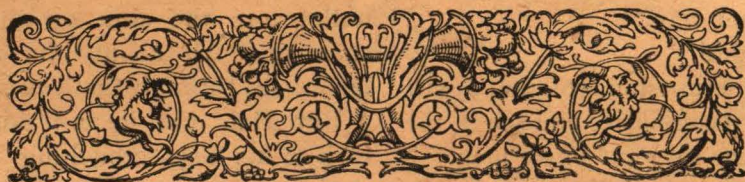
As for the Cubans, so complete was the ambush that they lost but three or four men.

A glorious victory! Yet a different—far different tale!—would have been told, but for the heroic work of Lieutenant

Hal Maynard, special operator on Uncle Sam's special wire!

[THE END.]

A dashing story will be told in next week's issue of the Starry Flag, No. 6, entitled, "The Prisoner of Matanzas; or, Hal Maynard in the Enemy's Clutches." This splendid narrative will contain a superb description of the first American bombardment of a Spanish stronghold. The part that Hal Maynard plays in it is strong, thrilling and dramatic. As a narrative of actual war, "The Prisoner of Matanzas" is a masterpiece. You'll agree with us when you've read it.



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Ainslee's Magazine...

For June 1898

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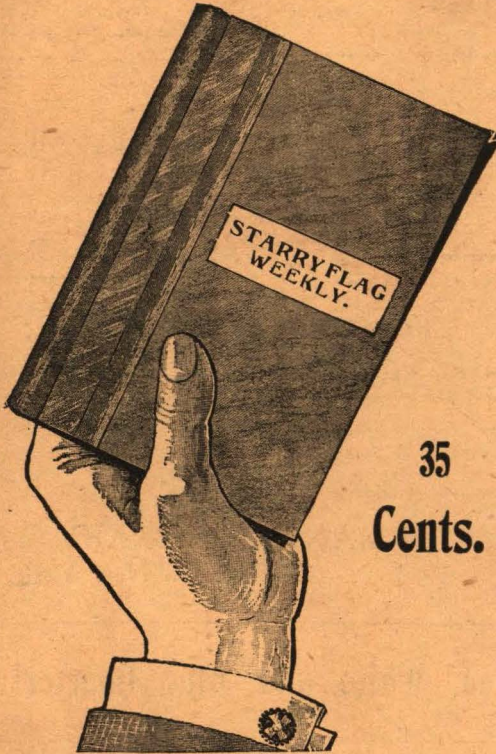
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